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The Graveyard School of Poets

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THE GRAVEYARD SCHOOL OF POETS

BY

JAMES ORTON HUFF

A. B. University of Illinois, 1911

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

IN ENGLISH

IN

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1912

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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

June 1, 1912

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

James Orton Huff

ENTITLED The Graveyard School of Poets

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF Master of Arts

Elmer P. Sherman
In Charge of Major Work

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Recommendation concurred in:

Committee
on
Final Examination

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C O N T E N T S

CHAPTER I.

Melancholy Literature of the Seventeenth Century, and the Melancholy Prose of the early Eighteenth Century.

CHAPTER II.

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CHAPTER IV.

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If all the elements, the Earth, the Sea,
Ayre and Fire, so merry be,
Why is man's mirth so seldom and so small,
Who is compounded of them all?

--- Love's Riddle.

CHAPTER I.

There is a pretty general tendency among modern literary critics to emphasise the minor poetry of Milton as largely responsible for the large amount of meditative verse written during the eighteenth century, especially during the period 1740 - 1760. The first half of the century saw a revival of interest in Milton and there is no doubt that his minor poems had some influence on certain poets of that period; but the similarity between the spirit of "Il Penseroso" and that of such poems as Gray's "Elegy", Blair's "Grave", and Parnell's "Night Piece on Death", seems far from striking enough to justify the phrase "the Il Pensero/so school". The following two quotations illustrate the tendency. W. L. Phelps[1], in his chapter on the influence of Milton in the romantic movement, says, "But it was not so much in form as in thought that Milton affected the Romantic movement; and although Paradise Lost was always reverentially considered his greatest work, it was not at this time nearly so effective as his minor poetry; and in the latter it was Il Penseroso - the love of meditative comfortable melonchely - that penetrated most deeply into the Romantic soul." H. A. Beers[2], in discussing the"Miltonic group", says, "The poem of Milton which made the deepest impression upon the new school of poets was 'Il Penseroso'. This little masterpiece - - - - - - - - fell in with a current of tendency." Mr. Beers says farther on[3], "But the 'Elegy' (of Gray) is the masterpiece of this whole'Il Penseroso'

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1. Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement, p.87
2. History of English Romanticism in the 18th century, p.162
3. p.175

school, and has summed up for all English readers, for all time, the poetry of the tomb." This current of tendency was most certainly generated by a force of far greater importance than Milton's minor poems, and could have received only small aid from them.

The "tendency" was the revolt against the gayety of the Queen Anne Age, coupled with the religious revival of the period. The second decade of the century saw the efforts of the Addisonian school to improve the morals of the age, and the third and fourth decades saw the efforts of Law and Wesley and their followers to turn man's minds to spiritual things. The criticism cited fails to take into account, first, the fact that the first half of the eighteenth century was a period of spiritual unrest and regeneration; and, second, that such subjects as death, the brevity of life, solitude, ghosts, graveyards, tombs, melancholy, and meditation, appealed to writers of both poetry and prose in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Indeed the English mind is proverbially melancholy and citations from the authors of the earliest periods of Anglo Saxon literature would reveal states of mind as gloomy and meditative as those revealed in the "Grave" and the "Elegy". Pomfret's "Prospect of Death"[1], and Flatman's "A Dooms-day Thought"[2] are as sepulchral in tone as the most gloomy of the melancholy verse of the eighteenth century; but surely no one will contend that Milton's minor poetry was very influential during the next generation following his

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1. Published 1700. Pomfret lived 1667 - 1702
2. Written 1659. Flatman lived 1637 - 1688

death, and besides, the melancholy which Milton courts is the melancholy conducive to study and thoughtfulness. As a student he wishes to retire from the tumult of daily life. The spirit of "Il Penseroso" is most prominent in the eighteenth century poems on "solitude", rather than in those poems where new-dug graves, and grinning ghosts are ever before the reader. Fancy Milton writing by the light of a candle stuck in a skull, or reveling in the spectacle of parading ghosts! Also, the latter part of the seventeenth century was very productive of theological literature. There are a number of meditations and contemplations, both in prose and in poetry, and always with the one dominant note, viz., the spiritual uplift that follows serious meditation on life, its brevity, duties, and ends. In speaking of the nature of the publications during the latter half of the seventeenth century, T. S. Perry says[1], "There are statistics to show this: between 1666 and June 12, 1680, there were published 3550 books. Of these 947 treated on theology." These 947 books must have played no little part in bringing about the changes, literary and moral, which were ushered in by the Revolution of 1688. On this point Taine says[2], "Little by little, in manners and in literature, we can trace the empire of a serious, reflective, moral spirit." To look somewhat closely into the nature of some of this literature will make it evident that the graveyard spirit in literature did not have its birth in the

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1. English Literature in the 18th Century, p.38
2. History of English Literature, II : 45

eighteenth century, but that the melancholy poetry of that century is only a continuation of that of the preceding century.

Thomas Traherne (1636 - 1674) wrote"Centuries of Meditations"[1]. The work consists of four "centuries", each of which contains one hundred paragraphs, ranging in length from less than three lines to more than forty-two. Traherne beholds the sun, and abhors "the madness of those who esteem a purse of gold more than it."[2] He is continually filled with thanksgiving for the wonderful harmony of the created system. That the sun moves, that day and night succeed, that season succeeds season, call forth unending gratitude. "Did the Sun stand still that you might have a perpetual day, You would not know the sweetness of repose: the delightful vicissitudes of night and day, the early sweetness and spring of the morning, the perfume and beauty in the cool of the evening, would all be swallowed up in meridian splendor[3]." This expresses the same enthusiasm for outdoor nature that we see manifested in such a poem as Joseph Warton's "Enthusiast", or Collins' "Ode to Evening". In another place[4] Traherne rejoices at the removal of all covetousness, ambition, and infidelity. Desire of worldly possessions, of fame, of worldly grandeur, are all to be shunned as evils; and this is a dominant note in many of the meditative poems of the following

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1. Published in London, 1908; so it is cited only to show the tendency to meditate, not for its influence.
2. Second "century", Par. 7
3. Second "century", Par. 9
4. First "century", Par. 24

century. We need to do no more than mention the names of Gray, Blair, and Young.

Another important writer of meditative, mortuary prose was Sir Thomas Browne (1605 - 1682). His "Urn Burial" is as funereal as Gray's "Elegy", or Parnell's "Night Piece on Death". Browne finds food for thought in "these dead bones" which have already outlasted the living ones of Methuselah, "and in a yard under ground outworn all the strong and specious buildings above it".[1] He exhibits the interest both of the antiquarian and of the moralist. "We are coldly drawn into discourses of antiquities, who have scarce time before us to comprehend new things, or make out learned novelties".[2] The moralizing tendency is seen in the following:

"Beside to preserve the living and make the dead to live, to keep men out of their Urnes, and discourse of humane fragments in them, is not impertinent unto our profession; whose study is life and death, who daily behold examples of mortality and of all men least need artificial mementos, or coffins by our bedside, to reminde us of our graves".[3] Thus it is evident that Browne is impressed with the uncertainty of life, and the frailty of mortal things. The sentiment expressed hereis echoed by the poets of the mid-eighteenth century who found a striking parallel between a crumbling structure and human life. The grewsomeness of Hervey's "Meditations Among the Tombs" is approached in places.

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1 Chapter V
2 Epist. Ded.
3 Epist. Ded.

"If they fell by long and aged decay, yet wrapt up in a bundle of time, they fall into indistinction and make but one blot with the Infants;"[1] or "To be knav'd out of our graves, to have our sculs made drinking-bowls, and our bones turned into pipes, to delight and sport our Enemies, are Tragicall abominations escaped in burning Burials."[2] This is even more than funereal in tone: it is ghoulish. The following quotation contains the same sentiment found in a stanza of Gray's "Elegy": "Who knows whether the best of men be known? Or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot then (than) any that stand remembered in the known account of time?" The stanza of the "Elegy" referred to is:

"Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre."

"The number of the dead long exceedeth all that shall live,"[3] seems pretty clearly echoed (whether consciously or not we need not inquire) in the line. "'Tis long since death had the majority."[4]

The moralizing and didactic nature of "The Urn Burial," chapter V, which one critic has characterised as "a solemn homily on death and immortality,"[5] is so closely akin to that of Hervey's "Meditations among the Tombs", that one feels that Brown's garden at Norwich might well have given rise to a forerunner of "Reflections on a Flower Garden."

John Norris (1657 - 1711) is another writer of interest

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1. Chapter V. 2. Ibid. 3. Chapter V.
4. Blair's "Grave". 450. 5. Dict. of Nat. Biol. III : 68.

to us. In 1687 he published his "most popular book the Miscellanies," which consists of poems, essays, discourses and letters. By 1730 the book had reached its tenth edition. In the collection are many meditative poems, some of the titles of which follow: "The Parting","TheRetirement", "The Infidel", "The Choice", "The Meditation", "The Complaint", "The Discouragement", "Content", "The Prospect", "To Melancholy", "The Discontent", "The Impatient", and "Superstition". Mr. A. B. Grosart was immensely pleased with the two last named poems of Norris. His remark is, "Then there are the remarkable, the very remarkable poems entitled "The Impatient" and "Supersition" - than which there are few finer things, in their immense longing and sorrow and baffled speculation and appeal."[1] In pointing outsome of the similarities between some lines of Blair's "Grave" and lines from some of Norris' poems, he says, "That Norris was the source whence Blair fetched his smile (of angel's visits), there can be no doubt. As I would now proceed to show, he has taken other of the memorabilia of "The Grave" from the same volume of "Miscellanies"."[2] The temptation to charge indebtedness on no other ground than verbal analogy is one to be guarded against; but some of the comparisons which Mr. Grosart has made will be noted in connection with "The Grave" and the reader may judge for himself.

In the preface to his volume of Miscellanies Norris states it as one of his objects to "restore the declining Genius of Poetry to its primitive and genuine Greatness, and so he has

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1 Miscellanies of the Fuller Worthies Libr. vol. 38, p. 15.
2 Ibid., p. 14.

"made choice for the most part of Divine and moral subjects," subject which we shall find particularly attractive to the poets of the eighteenth century. One of the discourses is entitled "Contemplation and Love: or the Methodical Assent (ascent) of the Soul to God, by Steps of Meditation." Each of the six contemplations is followed by a prayer. The spirit of the author can be gotten from the following quotation:

"In the Depth of Solitude and Silence, having not only withdrawn myself/from all Worldly Commerce, but from all Thoughts concerning any Thing without my own Sphere; I retire wholly into my self, and there speculate the Composition of my Intellectual Nature." In "Contemplation III" he locates the cause of "Melancholy Dejections": "Now I consider that if mean Persons only were subject to Melancholy, the Desire from whence it proceeded might be accounted for another way; namely, from their not having so much of Created Good, as if possess'd, might be thought sufficient to satisfie. But when Men that sit on the Top of Fortune's Wheel, and drink at the head Fountains of Nature, are yet liable to Melancholy Dejections, 'tis to me a plain Argument, that the cause of this Melancholy, their Desires, proceeds from a Deficiency in the Things themselves; not that they are straitned in their Possessions, but that the Things which they possess, are weigh'd in the Ballance and found wanting." This is the same idea we find engaging the minds of many of the poets of the eighteenth century. Samuel Johnson says,[1]

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1. "The Vanity of Wealth, an Ode."

"To purchase heaven has gold the power?
Can gold remove the mortal hour?
In life can love be bought with gold?
Are friendship's pleasures to be sold?
NO - all that's worth a wish - a thought,
Fair virtue gives unbrib'd, unbought."

Norris also praises solitude. He does not commend the "undertaking of those Ascetics, that out of a pretence of keeping themselves unspotted from the world, take up their Quarters in Desarts, and utterly abandon all Human Society: This is in short (- - -) to put themselves into an incapacity either of doing any good to the World, or of receiving any from it; and certainly that can be no desirable state."[1] But it is a frequent withdrawal into seclusion for contemplation, and to avoid the ill effects of immoral company. He laments that a man may not easily "light upon a Company, where, as his first Salutation, he shall not presently have a Bottle thrust to his Nose."[2] This is a sane conception of solitude, not an affectation of love for solitude of the Crusoe kind, which affectation, it may be remarked, is sometimes met with in the poetry of the following century.

In 1689 was published his "Reason and Religion: or the Grounds and Measures of Devotion - - - - in several Contemplations." This book consists of two parts and in all twelve "Contemplations," "with exercises of devotion applied to every contemplation." We shall not dwell longer on this work than to give a quotation from

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1. On Solitude.
2. ibid.

the preface to the reader, which will show Norris' purpose, and at the same time his opinion concerning the spiritual condition of the learned of his day. "I thought I could not employ my Pen to better purpose than in writing something of the like Kind (i.e. "of a Devotional Nature") for the use of the Learned Reader, who, perhaps needs as much to be assisted in his Devotion as the more Ignorant; and whose Heart may want as much to be Inflamed, as the others Head does to be Instructed."

For the present we leave Norris, taking time only to quote his little poem, "The Return".

I

Dear Contemplation, my Divinest Joy,
When I thy sacred Mount ascend
What Heavenly sweets my Soul employ!
Why can't I there my days for ever spend?
When I have conquered thy steep Heights with pain
What pity 'tis that I must down again!

II

And yet I must; my Passions would rebel
Should I too long continue here:
No, here I must not think to dwell,
But mind the Duties of my proper Sphere.
So Angels, tho they Heaven's Glories know,
Forget not to attend their charge below.

If any one objects that these are subjects in which we

should expect to find ministers of the gospel interested, and that the productions of such writers are not to be considered a true evidence of a literary tendency, he may be answered that Young "took Orders", Parnell was "ordained bishop", and Blair "received license to preach." Besides, only a small number of the seventeenth century writers who are cited were divines.

There is a minor poet of the century who, though he lived earlier in the century, is worth quoting in this connection. William Cartwright (d. 1643), who was a member of the "tribe of Ben", wrote a short poem on Sadness. The poet is "swathed up with yew and cypress boughs", mourning the death of a loved one. The poem ends, ghastly enough:

Lo! thus unto thy silent tomb,
In my sad winding sheet, I come,
Creeping o'er dead bones,
And cold marble stones,
That I may mourn
Over thy urn,
And appease thy groans."

The poem containes only three rather short stanzas, but in it are found these tools with which the graveyard poet wrought: yew, cypress, sadness, sighs, darkness, weep, owls, raven, elegy, graves, bones, cold marble stones, mourn, urn, tomb, winding sheet.

The Earl of Roscommon (1632? - 1684) wrote an "Ode Upon Solitude." Solitude as a trainer of morals and an escape from the vanities of the world enlists the sympathies of Roscommon:

Hail sacred solitude! from this calm bay,
I view the world's tempestuous sea,
And with wise pride despise
All those senseless vanities.
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -
It is by thee I truly live,
Thou dost a better life and nobler vigor give,
Dost each unruly appetite control.

His closing wish is:

"Here may I always on this downy grass,
Unknown, unseen, my easie minites pass,
Till with a gentle force victorious Death
My solitude invade,
And, stopping for a while my breath,
With ease convey me to a better shade."

This is the same note that we hear in James Thomson's "Hymn on Solitude":

"Perhaps from Norwood's oak-clad hill,
When Meditation has her fill,
I just may cast my careless eyes
Where London's spiry turrets rise,
Think of its crimes, its cares, its pain,
Then shield me in the woods again;"

and in Joseph Warton's "Ode to Solitude":

"Musing maid, to thee I come,
Hating the tuneful city's hum,
O let me calmly dwell with thee,
From noisy mirth and bus'ness free,
With meditation seek the skies,
This folly-fetter'd world despise."

"A Prospect of Death, a Pindaric Essay", was written by John Pomfret(1667 - 1702), a Bedfordshire divine. Pomfret is best known for "The Choice", of which Samuel Johnson says, "Perhaps no composition in our language has been oftener perused."[1] But our special interest in Pomfret lies in the fact that he wrote the "Prospect of Death". Pomfret published his poems in 1699, so we are safe in saying that this poem was written during the last quarter of the century.

In the description of the ghastly horror of the last hours, it compares very favorably with "The Grave". In "A Prospect of Death" we find:

"Our dying eyes roll heavily about,
Their light just going out;
And for some kind assistance call:
But pity, useless pity's all
Our weeping friends can give."

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1. Life of Pomfret.

In the "Grave" are these lines:

"In that dread moment how the frantic soul
Raves round the walls of her clay tenement,
Runs to each avenue, and shrieks for help,
But shrieks in vain! - How wishfully she looks
On all she's leaving, now no longer her's!"[1]

Pomfret also, like Blair, has pictured the peaceful end of the righteous man.

"But the good man, whose soul is pure,
Unspotted, regular, and free
From all the ugly stains of lust and villany,
Of mercy and of pardon sure,
Looks through the darkness of a gloomy night,
And sees the dawning of a glorious day."

Lines 712 - 718 of the "Grave" run thus:

Sure the last end
Of the good man is peace! - How calm his exit!
Night dews fall not more gently to the ground,
Nor weary, worn-out winds expire so soft.
Behold him in the evening tide of life,
A life well spent, whose early care it was
His riper years should not upbraid his green."

Pomfret and Blair were also similarly impressed by the vanity of wealth. Lines 350 - 354 of "The Grave" run thus:

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1 Lines 354 - 358

"How shocking must thy summons be O Death!
To him that is at ease in his possessions;
Who counting on long years of pleasure here,
Is quite unfurnished for that world to come."

In Pomfret's "Prospect of Death" we find these lines:

Then we are sensible too late,
'Tis no advantage to be rich or great:
For all the fulsome pride and pageantry of state
No consolation brings.
Riches and honor then are worthless things,
Tasteless, or bitter all."

We shall quote from Pomfret's "Prospect" one more passage, which alone entitles him to an equal standing with Blair, Parnell, and Gray as a portrayer of death and its gloom:

"When to the margin of the grave we come,
And scarce have one black, painful hour to live;
No hopes, no prospect of a kind reprieve,
To stop our speedy passage to the tomb;
How moving, and how mournful, is the sight!
How wondrous pitiful, how wondrous sad!
Where then is refuge, where is comfort, to be had
In the dark minutes of the dreadful night,
To cheer our drooping souls for their amazing
(flight?"

Thomas Flatman (1637 - 1688) wrote three poems which will prove of interest in this chapter. They are "Death: A Song", "A Thought of Death", and "A Dooms-Day Thought". The note in each of these is as funereal as that in the most typical of the eighteenth century graveyard poems. The first pictures

"the sad day,
When friends shall shake their heads and say
Of miserable me,
Hark how he groans, look how he pants for breath",

and

"When some old Friend shall step to my Bed side,
Touch my chill face, and thence shall gently slide."

Flatman again leads us to the death-bed in his "Thought of Death."

"When on my sick bed I languish,
Full of sorrow, full of anguish,
Fainting, gasping, trembling, crying,
Panting, groaning, speechless, dying,
My soul just now about to take her flight,
Into the regions of eternal night.
Oh tell me you
That have been long below,
What shall I do!"[1]

Had this poem never been written, nor the dying Hadrian addressed his soul, nor Sappho left a "fine fragment" of a similar nature, we would probably be without Pope's "The Dying Christian to his

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1 Blair exclaims, "The Grave", lines 461 - 2 et.seq.,
(Reference continued on bottom page 17.)

Soul." Steele wrote to Pope (December 4, 1712) desiring him to "make an Ode as of a cheerful dying spirit, that is to say, the Emperor Adrian's Animula vagula put into two or three stanzas for music." Later Pope sent Steele the desired poem, and in the letter accompanying it he admits, "I had in my head not only the verses of Adrian, but the fine fragment of Sappho." Now, to compare a few lines of Pope's Ode with a few of Flatman's "Thought of Death" will make it apparent, I think, that Pope was indebted to a rather obscure poet of the seventeenth century, as well as to the heathen emperor and the Greek poetess.

The lines quoted from "A Thought of Death" seems pretty clearly echoed in the following lines of Pope's "Dying Christian:"

"Vital spark of heav'nly flame!
Quit, oh quit this mortal frame,
Trembling, hoping, ling'ring , flying,
Oh the pain, the bliss of dying."

Pope in the second stanza has,

"Hark! they whisper; Angels say,
Sister Spirit, come away."

Lines 12 - 13 of Flatman's poem are:

"Methinks I hear some Gentle Spirit say,
Be not fearful, come away!"

In the article[1] on Flatman in the Dictionary of National Biography

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(Cont. p.16) "Tell us ye dead! will none of you in pity
To those you left behind, disclose the secret?
- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

1. By A. H. Bullen

is this statement, which is quoted chiefly for the parenthesis: "But his other poems are better. 'A Thought of Death' (which Pope imitated in 'The Dying Christian to his Soul') and 'Death, a Song', are singularly impressive."[1]

Another of Flatman's poems is "A Dooms-Day Thought". The poet is impressed with the necessity of making provision for death.

"What shall we do! we cannot run
For Refuge, or the strict Judge shun.
'Tis too late then to think what course to take;
While we live here we must Provision make."

He fancies the last day is approaching, that the stars tremble and grow dim, and, when he hears a blustering wind, that Nature

"Practices how to breathe her last."

The poem continues:

"Go to the dull Church-yard and see
Those Hillocks of Mortality.
Where proudest man is only found
By a small swelling in the Ground.
What crouds of Carcasses are made
Slave to the Pickax and the Spade!
Dig but a foot, or two, to make
A cold bed, for thy dead Friends sake,
'Tis odds but in that scantling room
Thou robbs't another of his Tomb,
Or in thy delving smits't upon

1. Vol. 7, p. 251.

A Shinbone, or a Cranion.[1]

When the Prison's full what next can be
But the Grand Goal - Delivery?
The Great assize.

- -

When from the Dungeon of the Grave
The meager Throng themselves shall heave,
Shake off their Linnen Chains, and gaze
With wonder."[2]

This funeral note , or blast of Gabriel, is continued, and the poem ends with the admonition offered in the first four lines quoted. Three other poems of Flatman of this same contemplative nature are "Nudus Redibo","On Poverty", and "Job".

It would not be a difficult matter to continue this citation of melancholy literature of the seventeenth century to a much greater length. "Melancholy Cowley" with his Ode "Upon the Shortness of Man's Life", and "The Complaint", Dryden with his numerous elegies, epitaphs and Odes, and Thomas Fuller with his "Personal Meditations", are three of a considerable number of writers of their century who meditated on life, its brevity, its object, and its obligations. But enough evidence has been produced, it is believed, to show that melancholy subjects were by no means unfamiliar to the writers, both of poetry and prose,

1. Here is "poor Yorick", receiving another knock!

2. These last lines resemble in thought three lines of Parnell's "Night Piece":

"The bursting earth unveils the shades!
All slow, and wan, and wrapp'd with shrouds,
They rise in visionary crowds."

of the seventeenth century. The love of gloom, imagery of the grave, the gasp of the dying, the brevity of life, the vanity of wealth, the restorative virtues of solitude, have all been treated by poets and prose writers before the dawn of the century that saw the production of the "Elegy", "The Grave", and the "Night Piece on Death".

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the English reading public was becoming exceedingly restive under the domination of licentious poetry and stage and immorality in general. Indeed, before the close of the former century the crusade against the immoral drama had been inaugurated by Collier and his followers. This moral laxness, which was found in all classes of society as well as on the stage, was a heritage handed down from the Restoration period. "Thus almost in vain have the throne and the pulpit cried reformation; while the stage and licentious poems have waged open war with the pious designs of church and state."[1] These are the words of Dr. Watts (d. 1748) in the preface to his poems.

William Law says,[2] "It is for want of this intention (i.e., to please God in all the actions of life) that you see men who profess religion, yet live in swearing and sensuality; that you see Clergymen given to pride and covetousness, and worldly enjoyments. It is for want of this intention that you see

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1. Anderson's Brit. Poets. IX: 296.
2. "A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life" was first published 1728.

women who profess Devotion, yet living in all the folly and vanity of dress."[1] The religious revival of the first half of the century was one of England's greatest popular movements, and the two greatest names associated with it are Law and Wesley. Law's "Serious Call", tho the author was somewhat of a mystic, was one of the most influential books of the century. Leslie Steven says[2] it is "one of the books which has made a turning point in many men's lives. It specially affected Samuel Johnson and John Wesley, and many of those who sympathised more or less with Wesley's movement."

It is felt that no extended review of the religious-moral movement in England during the period 1700 - 1750 is called for. But it will be relevant to the task in hand to recall the opinions, efforts, and influence of some of the leading thinkers of the period; and further to show that the tendency to meditate in solitude, among the tombs, or at midnight, was by no means confined to the poets. The great spiritual and moral leaders of the period would persuade mankind that lasting happiness can not come from things temporal, that pride in dress and riches, and a general laxity of morals, were vices of the time which were calling for correction. One of the primary objects of the editors of periodicals in the early part of the century was the reformation of morals. This is too well known to need further mention. Steele says,[3] "They (ladies) should consider that

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1. Works, IV: 15 - 16
2. English Lit. and Socy. in 18th cent. pp.87 - 8.
3. Ladies Library, I : 67.

cloaths were not the effect of Pride, but of Sin, and instead of making them vain it should humble and mortify them;" and further "If Dress, as we are told in Scripture, was to cover Nakedness, it seems in our days not to answer the end of it, especially with the Ladies." De Foe says, "Immorality is without doubt the present reigning Distemper of the Nation."[1] In writing to a young clergyman (January, 1719) Swift says, "It is allowed on all handsthat the people of England are more corrupt in their morals than any other nation at this day under the sun." These quotations are given only to show the opinion of some of the leading thinkers concerning the state of morality and manners of their day. The essayist preaches a series of sermons on subjects varying from the shortness of life to the extravagant size of petticoats, and his efforts are re-inforced by those of the clergy, who employ more time in pointing out the sins of the age than elucidating scripture. It was an age of unrest, spiritual and moral. To show the influemce of Law's "Serious Call" on one of the greatest, if not the greatest mind of the century, will be worth while at this point.

To his fourteenth year Johnson's attitude towards religion may be characterized as "indifferent" but at this time it changed for the worse (for the better, ministers would say), and he "became a sort of lax talker against religion, for I did not much think against it, and this lasted until I went to Oxford,[2] where it would not be suffered. When at Oxford, I took up Law's

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1. "The Poor Man's Plea", published 1698
2. October, 1728

'Serious Call to a Holy Life', expecting to find it a dull book (as such books generally are), and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me, and this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest of religion."[1] Boswell continues, "From this time forward, religion was the predominant object of his thoughts."[2] It is Johnson, "that incarnation of strong sense", as Leslie Stephen calls him, who in later years portrays Rasselas as a lover of solitude and melancholy contemplation, and thus takes a thrust at the optimistic. That Johnson should find a book, not dull", but useful through the remainder of his life, is sufficient proof, of itself, that that book had no little influence on the thought of the age. The same author also is convinced that to trust to this world's goods for peace is vain, and offers this advice to the disappointed:

"Pour forth thy fervours for a healthful mind,[3]
Obedient passions, and a will resign'd."

Some idea of the popularity of Law's "Serious Call" may be gained from the fact that it was first published in 1728 and by 1762, the date of the first collected edition of Law's works, had reached the tenth edition.

By 1740 the work of Whitefield and the Wesleys was well under way. An important feature of their sermons, especially those of John Wesley, was the tendency to picture the awful, tragic fate in store for the sinner. The gaping tomb and the horror of future damnation are constant themes; and the peaceful

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1. Boswell, Life, p.13 2. Ibid.
3. "Vanity of Human Wishes", lines 337 - 8

end of the righteous man is never lost sight of. Both these characteristics mark the more important graveyard poems. Blair says

"Sure the last end
Of the good man is peace! - How calm his exit!"[1]

and the poet in the "Elegy" finally rests in the "bosom of his Father and his God."

Melancholy subjects were treated in prose as well as in poetry during the first half of the eighteenth century, and in some cases much more extensively. Addison walks among the tombs in Westminster Abbey, where "the gloominess of the place, and the use to which it is applied, with the solemnity of the building and the condition of the people who lie in it, are apt to fill the mind with a kind of melancholy, or rather thoughtfulness, that is not disagreeable."[2] He entertains himself with the digging of a grave, and sees in every shovelful the fragment of a bone or skull intermixt with a kind of fresh mouldering earth, that some time or other had a place in the composition of a human body." Like Blair and Hervey,[3] he is impressed by friends and enemies, priests and soldiers, lying peacefully together, and by the blending into one promiscuous heap of beauty, strength, youth, old age, weakness, and deformity. He leaves the tombs considering "that great day when we shall all of us be contemporaries, and make our appearance together." Two other pieces of prose of this

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1. "The Grave" Lines 712 -13
2. "Spectator", No. 26.
3. In "Meditations Among the Tombs".

same gloomy nature are "The Vision of Mirza"[1] and "A Death-bed Scene."[2]

Goldsmith indulged his taste for gloomy reflection on the wretchedness of mankind. Letter CXVI of the "Citizen of the World" is entitled "A City Night-Piece". The philosopher, at two in the morning, reflects on the empty streets and the sallies of the vicious ones while "the watchman forgets the hour in slumber." "What a gloom hangs all around! the dying lamp feebly emits a yellow gleam, no sound is heard but of the chiming clock, or the distant watch-dog. All the bustle of human pride is forgotten, an hour like this may well display the emptiness of human vanity." He is impressed by the "transience of every sublunary possession" and concludes, "There will come a time when this temporary solitude may be made continual, and the city itself, like its inhabitants, fade away, and leave a desart in its room."[3]

Another writer of interest in this connection is Vincent Bourne (1695 - 1747). Bourne is best known for his Latin poems, but his interest for us lies in one[4] of his minor English poems and a letter to a young lady. He edited a collection of poems in 1731, and another in 1734. A second edition was issued in 1735, and a third in 1743. The edition used is dated Oxford and London, 1826. Prefixed to the poems are two letters, one "from the author to a young lady", the other written to his wife a few

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1. "Spectator", No. 159.
2. "The Tatler", No. 114.
3. Goldsmith's works, Vol. IV, p. 212, ed. 1801
4. Which will be given in the list at the end.

weeks before his death. It is the former in which we are interested. It begins, "I am just come from indulging a very pleasing melancholy in a country churchyard, and paying a respectful visit to the dead, of which I am one day to increase the number." Like Addison among the tombs in Westminster Abbey he is disposed to meditation by the solitude and silence of the situation. He learns a lesson of mortality from every hillock and looks upon the churchyard as the "rendezvous of the whole parish, whither, people of all ages and conditions resort."[1] The grave is a leveler, that quiets all contentions and suspicions, and reduces all to a "state of perfect equality." The vanity of funereal show and the mockery of "laboured epitaph", the flattery of painted sepulchre and the seeming strength of leaden coffin and arched vault, are all looked upon as mere "tinsel show"; for whatever precaution may be taken for the preservation of the corpse, the worm shall find it, "nor shall his hunger be satisfied till he strip it to the bones." The grave is a refuge for those "whose life has been altogether misery," a retreat from insolence and contempt, a security to him who "had no place to flee unto."

His use of the term[2] "night piece" is interesting as showing that that phrase was not confined to the realm of poetry. "I desire you to accept of this night piece, drawn by an artless hand; and when that hand shall be mouldering in dust, to peruse the picture, and then be assured that though it be artless - 'tis

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1. cf.
"To paint the gloomy horror of the tomb;
The appointed place of rendezvous whereall
These travellers meet." - "The Grave", lines 5 - 7

2. Also Goldsmith's, above.

true." The last part of the sentence is quoted to show that the writer felt that there was truth in what he had been saying and that it was not to be considered as merely sentimental.

We will quote once more from this letter to show how Bourne locates the cause of his melancholy. "It must be the frequent perusal of gravestones and monuments, and the many walks I have taken in a churchyard, that have given me so great a distaste for life; the usual sight of mortality, corruption, and nakedness, must inevitably lead one to a serious reflection on the vanity of all human greatness. The very pride of a man, considered in this view, is his reproach, and his haughtiness becomes his shame."

Another important writer of mortuary prose, probably the most important in the history of English literature, is the Reverend James Hervey (1714 - 1758). His "Meditations Among the Tombs," together with "Reflections on a Flower Garden" and "A Descant upon Creation," was published in February, 1746; and a second volume containing "Contemplations on the Night", "Contemplations on the Starry Heavens", and "A Winter Piece", was published the following year. All these treatises show that love of contemplation which we have seen so prominent in the works of such men as Traherne and Norris in the former century, and in such a writer as Addison in the early eighteenth century. The Reverend Canon Overton says[1] of Hervey's writings, "These volumes are filled with truisms expressed in the most inflated language, but were

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1. Dict. of Nat'l. Biog, IX : 734.

admired by educated persons, and even superceded to a great extent such a powerful work as Law's "Serious Call'." William Cowper in a letter[1] to Mrs. Cowper, after expressing a great liking for Pearsall's[2] "Meditations", says, "Perhaps I may be partial to Hervey for the sake of his other writings; but I can not give Pearsall the preference to him, for I think him one of the most scriptural writers in the world." Leslie Stephen says[3] "Hervey's 'Meditations' was one of the most popular books of the century."

In the preface the writer says, "I flatter myself that the thoughts conceived among the tombs may be welcome to the serious and humane mind: because, as there are few who have not consigned the remains of some dear relations or honoured friends to those silent repositories, so there are none but must be sensible that this is the house appointed for all living, and that they themselves are shortly to remove into the same solemn mansions." The 'Meditations' are written as "in aletter to a young lady", and the scene is in Cornwall, wherethe writer "took a walk to a church," and "in a situation so retired and awful I could not avoid falling into a train of meditations serious and mournfully pleasing." The work contains sixty-five pages, but it will not be necessary to devote a great amount of time to an examination of it, for it is the same melancholy treatment of the same melancholy theme which we have noticed in the letter by Bourne, the only important difference being that Hervey has dwelt more at length on some of

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1. April 17, 1766.
2. Pearsall (1698 - 1762) seems to have been a feeble imitator of Hervey.
3. English Thought in the 18th Century, II : 438.

the many different gloomy subjects.

On entering the church Hervey is first attracted by the lofty structure, a 'handsome altar-piece', and the lettered floor, which lettering proved to be matter of mourning, lamentation and wo. He recollects "Solomon's fine address to the Almighty, at the dedication of his famous temple," and is charmed; but on reflection he remembers how Solomon exalts the one and abases the other. On examining the records of mortality, he finds memorials of a promiscuous multitude. He finds sage and babe, master and servant, the opulent and the indigent, all enjoying the same sound sleep, with all distinction of rank and superiority gone.[1] "Yonder white stone" marks the resting place of an infant that "breathed out its tender soul almost the instant of receiving it."[2] The grave of a youth calls up the grief of a fond mother and an indulgent father, and the sudden death of a young man of twenty-eight provokes the admonition "Boast no more of tomorrow!"

We can not see the difference between the sentiment here and in all the melancholy prose which has been taken note of and that in the "Elegy", the "Grave", and the "Night Piece on Death"; nor can we detect the similarity between this sentiment and that which seems to have been at the basis of the production of "Il Penseroso". Blair, Parnell, Gray and Hervey sought gloom and quiet that they might moralise on the vanity and brevity of life: Milton courted quiet contemplation in the spirit of the student.

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1. cf. "Under ground precedency/a jest" - "The Grave".
2. cf. "The babe strangled in life's porch." - Ibid.

The dramatic element is prominent in the "Meditations". "The soul, just going to abandon the tottering clay, collects all her force, and exerts her last efforts. The good man raises himself on his pillow; extends a kind hand to his servants, which is bathed in tears; takes an affecting farewell of his friends; clasps his wife in a feeble embrace and kisses the dear pledges of their mutual love." This is one of a number of such passages in which the tragedy of death is depicted, and resembles in general and in detail a passage already quoted from Pomfret's "Prospect of Death", and one in "The Grave", which follows:

"What groan was that I heard? - deep groan indeed!
With anguish heavy laden; let me trace it:
From yonder bed it comes, where the strong man,
By stronger arm belaboured, grasps for breath
Like a hard-hunted beast. How his great heart
Beats thick! his roomy breast by far too scant
To give his lungs full play."[1]

The folly of worldly wisdom in him who provides more solicitously for time than for eternity is contrasted with the prudence of him who came to his last retreat "full of piety and full of days." The sudden death of the warrior is contrasted to the lingering death of Christ. In the vault he asks himself, "what is all the world to these poor breathless beings? What are their pleasures? A bubble broke. What their honours? A dream that is forgotten." He hears a sound, "'Tis the striking of a clock;[2]

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1. Lines 262-268. 2. The striking clock was a favorite with the poets of melancholy, as in the "Grave" and the "Elegy.

designed, one would imagine, to ratify all my serious meditations." Beauty, that wore perpetually an attractive smile, now grins horribly, "a naked, ghastly skull;" the business man "forgets his favorate schemes;" the great master of language and song "is become silent as the night that surrounds him," and meditating on this end of worldly greatness, he is reminded of the tree whose mortal taste "brought death into the world and all our woe," and exclaims, "O! thou Adam, what hast thou done?"

Often he makes a personal application of the conclusions reached, and asks, "must this sad change succeed in me also?"[1] And so the meditations continue. The weakness of flesh, the vanity of riches, the certainty of death, the folly of all worldly ambition, are here most forcibly brought to mind, and the wisdon of preparing for eternity is most forcibly impressed upon the beholder. And what are the surroundings that have brought the meditative man to these reflections and conclusions? What but death and the grave, and all their gloomy trappings? In the "Night Piece on Death", the "Elegy", and the "Grave", we find the same machinery treated in the same general way, and the same conclusions reached.

With this review of late seventeenth century prose and poetry and early eighteenth century prose in mind, the following conclusions seem fully justified. First , that interest in melancholy subjects is not pecular to poets of the eighteenth

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1. "Time was like thee they life possesst
And time shall be that thou shalt rest."
Night Piece on Death.

century. Writers of both prose and poetry during the preceding century were fond of dwelling on death, the grave, churchyards, and the day of judgment, and are often pleased to style their writings "meditations", and "contemplations". Second, all the pleasing gloom that attracted the authors of the most representative of the graveyard poems attracted in the same way some of the prose writers of the same half-century; and some of these were prose writers of the first rank. Third, the atmosphere in all this meditative verse and prose is largely morbid, full of death and ghosts and contemplation of the future life, and so is far removed from the spirit of Milton as exhibited in his poem "Il Penseroso", which expresses only the longing of the student for that quiet which is conducive to study. Fourth, in any consideration of the cause of the rise of the graveyard school of poets, itshould not be forgotten that the period 1700 - 1750 was a period of spiritual and moral regeneration, and that much of the melancholy literature of the period was written with the evident purpose of being spiritually and morally helpful.[1]

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1. In no less a poem than Young's "Complaint, or Night Thoughts," a favorate amusement of the poet is to set the infidel on a pedestal that he may knock him off.

CHAPTER II.

The more important subjects that appealed to the writers of melancholy verse during the eighteenth century were "death", "cemeteries", "solitude", "night" "hermits", "hermitages", "contemplation", "ruins", and "melancholy", and in taking a brief glance at the chief treatments of some of these subjects we can not do better than begin with the elegiac note sounded by William Shenstone.

Shenstone has left in a "Prefatory Essay on Elegy" his conception of that species of poetry. According to the principles here laid down, the elegy proceeds from a contemplative mind, illustrates and endears the private, and imitates the voice and language of grief. On the whole, his elegies may be said to conform to these requirements;[1] but if we read them prepared to cry, or even to feel sad, our preparation will usually be in vain. He meditates on the character of the ancient Britons, indulges the suggestions of spleen, writes to an estranged friend, and complains how soon the pleasing novelty of life is over, in all of which there is an air of pensiveness, but seldom the note of intense sorrow. Julia reading them would hardly have had occasion to demand,

"Antonia! where's my pocket-handkerchief?"

Near the middle of the century Shenstone retired to his estate, The Leasowes, where he realized his "ambition of rural

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1. Samuel Johnson says, "His compositions suit not ill to this description" (i.e., contemplative, plaintive, and serious).

Life of Shenstone.

elegance", and it was probably here that the whole of the twenty-six elegies were composed. His praise is lavished upon the domestic and rural virtues, upon the blessings of quiet retirement and sincerity, and his prayer (in Elegy I) is, "

"Ne'er may my vintage glad the sordid breast,
Ne'er tinge the lip that dares be insincere."

Elegy XV, in memory of a private family in Worchestershire approaches near to the tone usually expected in an elegy. Stanzas one and twelve will illustrate this, and also show how nearly the elegiac note of Gray was caught by his contemporary.

"From a lone tower, with reverend ivy crowned,
The pealing bell awaked a tender sigh;
Still, as the village caught the waving sound,
A swelling tear distream'd from every eye."

"No wild ambition fired their tranquil breast,
To swell with empty sounds a spotless name;
If fostering skies, the sun, the shower, were blest,
Their bounty spread; their field extent's the same."

In his attitude toward the solitary life, Shenstone resembles William Cowper. Not infrequently we hear quoted the first two lines of the latter author's poem, "Verses, Supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk during his solitary abode in the island of Juan Fernandez." But these first two lines,

"I am monarchof all I survey,
My right there is none to dispute,"

are far from giving the key note to the spirit of the solitary one. The following stanza, the third of the poem, shows his real attitude toward the solitary life:

"Society, friendship, and love,
Divinely bestow'd upon man,
O, had I the wings of a dove,
How soon would I taste thee again!
My sorrows I then might assuage,
In the ways of religion and truth,
Might learn from the wisdom of age,
And be cheered by the sallies of youth."

In Elegy XXIV, Shenstone "suggests the imperfect pleasures of a solitary life," and in the spirit in which Cowper writes:

"Even me, by shady oak or limped spring,
Even me, the scenes of polish'd life allure!
Some genius whispers, 'Life is on the wing,
And hard his lot that languishes obscure'."

His advice to the youth is,

"Go, plaintive Youth, no more by fount or stream,
Like some lone halcyon, social pleasures shun;
Go, dare the light, enjoy its cheerful beam,
And hail the bright procession of the sun."

Shenstone's elegies are written in a pleasing style and are not lacking in good moral sentiment and feeling; and, though sometimes full of the "To-Delia-with-some-Flowers" atmosphere, they are quite readable and make their author worthy of a better

word than Walpole had for him, who called him a "water gruel bard."

The following are some of the more important elegiac writers of the century. Pope, in his "Elegy to an Unfortunate Lady", laments the coldness of the world and congratulates the "unfortunate" one on her escape from it. James Beattie, in an "Elegy", expresses himself as tired with the busy crowd, and trusts that sleep will take him to "some romantic dale" and refresh him from worldly cares. Akenside renounces the tender passion in "Love, an Elegy", in which the burden is "Too much my heart of Beauty's power hath known." Allan Ramsay in "An Ode to the Memory of Mrs. Forbes", strikes the usual eighteenth century note of pensiveness:

"Ah, life! thou short uncertain blaze."

John Gay has left three elegies, "Panthea", "Araminta", and an "Elegy on a Lap-Dog". The first two are of the swain-shepherdess type, and we may dismiss them after noticing eight lines from the former. They are interesting for the gloom and solitude portrayed.

" Oh lead me to some melancholy cave,
To lull my sorrows in a living grave;
From the dark rock where dashing waters fall,
And creeping ivy hangs the craggy wall,
Where I may waste in tears my hours away,
And never know the seasons or the day."

Chatterton wrote a few short elegies, which are filled

with that intense sadness we expect to find in him. He usually uses the stanza form which Shenstone adopted in all his elegies, and which Gray used in the "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard;" and all the love of gloom and retirement shown by Gray is manifested frequently by Chatterton. Two stanzas will illustrate:

"The bubbling brook in plaintive murmurs roll,
The bird of omen, with incessant scream,
To melancholy thoughts awakes the soul,
And lulls the mind to contemplations dream."

"A dreary stillness broods o'er all the vale
The clouded moon emits a feeble glare;
Joyless I seek the darkling hill and dale,
Where'er I wander sorrow still is there."

This is only a cursory glance at some of the elegies written during the first three quarters of the century, but it is enough to show the different notes that entered into the elegiac strain of the period.

The subjects of hermits and hermitages appealed to several of the poets of the period of melancholy literature, and among the more important treatments of those subjects are by Parnell, Beattie, Mallet, Thomas Warton, Goldsmith, and William Whitehead.

Parnell's "The Hermit" portrays one who

"From youth to age a reverend hermit grew,"

and. late in life, wondering that vice should triumph sets out

"To clear his doubt, to know the world by sight."

But his experience does not satisfy his curiosity, for

"The bending hermit here a prayer begun,
'Lord! as in heaven, on earth thy will be done!'
Then gladly turning, sought his ancient place
And pass'd a life of piety and peace."

This treatment of the"hermit" is out of the ordinary in that the emphasis is laid on his experience with the world rather than on the virtues of seclusion as a trainer of the spiritual man.

Beattie's hermit, "by the cave of the mountain afar," laments that man is so foolish as to chase after fleeting glories. The moon's splender will be renewed, and kind Nature will care for the embryo blosson,

"But when shall spring visit the mouldering urn?
O when shall it dawn on the night of the grave?"

He is no longer betrayed by "false Science", but darkness and doubt are removed, and he looks forward to the time when

"On the cold cheek of Death smiles and roses
are blooming,
And Beauty immortal awakes from the tomb."

Thomas Warton's "Inscription in a Hermitage" pictures the kind of life ordinarily associated with the hermit. Here

"Beneath this stony roof reclin'd
I sooth to peace my pensive mind,"

and

"scorn the gay licentious crowd;"

the story of many a holy deed of martyrs is read, the measured hymn is sung, and the day rounded out in perfect peace on earth.

Goldsmith's ballad on "The Hermit" portrays, like Mallet's "Amyntor and Theodora, or The Hermit", the dissapointed lover who seeks solitude and is later restored to his loved one.

Another of the various subjects which appealed to the writers of melancholy verse was that of ruins. A crumbling structure suggested to them the shortness of man's life and in general the transitoriness of all mortal things. One of the most important of these poems is John Dyer's "Ruins of Rome". Dyer reviews the ancient glories of the ancient city, its walls, towers, art, rulers, luxury, and heroes, and then ends in the reflective lines,

"Vain end of human strength, of human skill,
Conquest, and triumph, and domain, and pomp,
And ease, and luxury! O Luxury
Bone of elated life, of affluent states,
What dreary change, what ruin is not thine."

George Keate's "Netley Abbey" is another representative poem on ruins. Keate views the remains of the ancient Cistercian monastery and moralises on the shortness of life and the bliss in store for him who trusts in the future. The solemnity of the place is conducive to contemplation, and the author meditates in a spirit very similar to that of Gray in the Churchyard; and in places the verbal resemblance between this poem and Gray's "Elegy" is very striking. The following two stanzas will illustrate:

"No other sound , ami'd these arches heard,
The death-like Silence of their Gloom molest,[1]
Save,[1] the shrill of some unsocial Bird,
That seeks the house of Solitude to rest.

Save,[1] when their tinkling[1] leaders to the shade
Of these cool grots, invite the fleecy Folds,[1]
Where oft the fated Ox supinely laid
With lowing[1] herds a distant[1] converse holds!"

The last stanza, which shows the usual moralizing and didactic spirit, follows:

"Reflect, ere (Victor of each lovely Frame)
Time bids th' external, fleeting Graces fade,
'Tis Reason's Base supports the noblest claim,
'Tis Sense preserves the Conquests Beauty made!"

Shenstone's "The Ruin'd Abbey", which on the whole resembles the two poems last noted, will be noticed only for the general spirit of solitude and meditation breathed in the first part. The following lines will illustrate the point and it will be noticed that the spirit is somewhat like that of the old philosophers who sought solitude for self culture.

"How pleas'd he treads her venerable shades,
Her solemn courts! the centre of the grove!
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1. These words are conspicuous in Gray's "Elegy".

Yet here may Wisdom, as she walks the maze,
Some serious truths collect, the rules of life,
And serious truths of mightier weight than gold!"

These three poems represent fairly the tendency to meditate on life in the presence of ruins. Usually there is not found the intense ghostliness met with in the poems on death and graves, but that fondness for moralizing on the vanity of the world and the fleeting nature of life is nearly always met with, and in this last particular such poems are of course a part of the literature of melancholy.

"Solitude" is another subject which was treated by a number of the eighteenth century poets. There is little manifestation of that spirit which led ascetics into deserts there to live and die unseen by mankind; but rather the desire of the poets to escape from the undesirable elements of society and yet be where they may always be aware of the social complications on the escape from which they may daily congratulate themselves. Samuel Johnson enumerates[1] five classes of admirers of solitude. First, those who would be out of the reach of censure or control; second, those who would retire from grossness, falsehood and brutality; third, those who would emulate the glory of great men. fourth, those who retire to employ more time in the duties of religion; and, fifth, those who consider solitude as the parent of philosophy, and "retire in expectation of greater intimacies with

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1. "The Adventurer", No. 126

science." It is worth noting that Johnson thinks those of the last class are least likely to be disappointed in their retirement; but feels unable to speak concerning the fourth.

Pope's "Ode to Solitude"[1] is in praise of the man who enjcys "a few paternal acres", and seems written in the spirit of one who felt unequal to the task society imposed upon, or at all events desirous of escaping that task.

"Blest, who can unconcern'dly find
Hours, days, and years, slide soft away,
In health of body, peace of mind,
Quiet by day."

This is not praise of the "Alexander Selkirk" solitude, but rather of the quiet rural retirement which is frequently praised by English writers; although in the last stanza he wishes he may

"Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I lie."

James Thomson in his "Hymn on Solitude" recognises many jcys retirement gives,

"But chief, when evening scenes decay,
And the faint landscape swims away,
Thine is the doubtful soft decline,
And that best hour of musing thine."

The last four lines leads one to think that Thomson is of the class who praise solitude as a retreat from grossness, falsehood, and brutality, the second class mentioned by Johnson:

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1. Written at the age of twelve.

"I just may cast my careless eyes,
Where London's spiry turrets rise,
Think of its crimes, its cares, its pain,
Then shield me in the woods again."

James Grainger (b. about 1723) has left an ode on "Solitude". The poet has lost a friend and courts solitude for relief. About the first two thirds of the poem is in the octosyllabic rhymed couplet, and the remainder, the answer of the "romantic maid" Solitude, is in the heroic couplet. The bereaved one is advised not to seek

"In shades a med'cine for a troubled mind,"

and some of the reasons given are interesting as resembling the general attitude of Johnson toward the secluded life, which, in short, is that those who withdraw to solitude may be said to "desert the station which Providence assigned them." The poet is told that

"God never made an independent man,
'Twould jar the concord of his general plan;"

and

"Should man through Nature solitary roam,
His will his sovereign, every where his home,
What force would guard him from the lion's jaw?"

So far this is rather against solitude than in praise of it, but the usual sentiment is found in the last three couplets, and is the same as that noticed in one of Shenstone's elegies,[1] in which

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1.No.XXIV

the youth is advised to live in society, and retire when age comes on.

"But when old age has silver'd o'er thy head,
When memory fails, and all thy vigour's fled,
Then mayst thou seek the stillness of retreat,
Then hear aloof the human tempest beat,
Then will I greet thee to my woodland cave,
Allay the pangs of age, and smooth thy grave."

James Beattie's "Retirement" is unsurpassed in the literature of melancholy, for musical flow of verse and the spirit of gloom and meditation. The youth, as in the last poem noticed, implores Solitude to grant him a retreat from "a tumultuous world's alarms," among the wastes

"Whose artless charms
Ne'er drew ambition's eye."

The following stanzas will best illustrate thespirit of the whole poem:

"Thy shades, thy silence now be mine,
Thy charms my only theme;
My haunt the hollow cliff, whose pine
Waves o'er the gloomy stream.
Whence the scared owl on pinions gray
Breaks from the rustling boughs,
And down the lone vale sails away
To more profound repose.

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- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

For me no more the path invites
  Ambition loves to tread;
No more I climb those toilsome heights
  By guileful hope misled;
Leaps my fond fluttering heart no more
  To Mirth's enlivening strain;
For present pleasure soon is o'er,
  And all the past is vain."

This illustrates that utter renunciation of ambition, society, and hope of pleasure from mingling with mankind, and as such is typical literature of melancholy. It is the cry of the hermit, and so is of a considerably different nature from that of the man who seeks occasional quiet for study and contemplation.

This brief glance at some of the representative treatments of the varying subjects which appeal/ed to the graveyard poets shows the general tendency to look upon life and society in general in the spirit of the pessimist.

CHAPTER III.

Thomas Parnell's
"Night Piece on Death".

In looking into the nature of this poem we are not at a loss to know why the author[1] was attracted by such a subject. In the first place, Parnell was a minister of the gospel, and so was naturally inclined to meditate on subjects closely associated with the future life. Secondly, he was subject to severe fits of melancholy. Goldsmith says[2] "when he found his fits of spleen and uneasiness, which sometimes lasted for weeks together, returning, he returned with all expedition to the remote parts of Ireland, and there made out a gloomy kind of satisfaction, giving hideous descriptions of the solitude to which he retired." Lastly, his last years were filled with grief for his wife, who died in 1711. We feel that this last fact is of importance, although the date of the composition of the "Night Piece" is unknown, for Edmund Gosse says[3] "Parnell's best pieces all belong to the period between 1713 - - - - - - - - - - - and his early death in 1718," and on the following page speaks of the "Night Piece" as a "remarkable ode." While it is impossible to determine the amount of influence which any event in an author's life may have had upon his writings, any important event in his life is always to be considered in a study of any or all of his works.

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1. Parnell was born 1679, and died 1718.
2. "Life of Parnell".
3. "History of English Literature (18th century)", p.136.

The "Night Piece on Death" is an ode with a helpful spiritual message, and deserves the praise given it by Gosse, Johnson, and Goldsmith. The first named author has spoken of it in the words noted in the preceding paragraph. Goldsmith says[1] "The Night Piece on Death deserves every praise and, I should suppose, with very little amendment, might be made to surpass all those night pieces and graveyard scenes that have since appeared." Samuel Johnson, commenting on this remark of Goldsmith's, says,[2] "The Night Piece on Death is indirectly preferred by Goldsmith to Gray's Churchyard; but, in my opinion, Gray has the advantage of dignity, variety, and originality of sentiment."

The poet tires of sitting at the feet of the sages and seeks a lesson from the grave.

"No more I waste the wakeful night,
Intent with endless view to pore
The schoolmen and the sages o'er:
Their books from wisdom widely stray,
Or point at best the longest way.
I'll seek a readier path, and go
Where wisdom's surely taught below."

He goes forth into the starlit night, and the setting is given. The breeze "forgets to breathe" and the "spangled show" is reflected in the lake. This last phrase quoted seems strangely pseudo-classical in the treatment of such an unclassical subject, but it

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1. "Life of Parnell".
2. "Life of Parnell"

is no doubt partly to be explained by the fact that the author was a close literary associate of Pope and his school. The grounds on the right retire"in dimness", but

"The left presents a place of graves,"

and the uncertain eye is guided by the church steeple. The six lines which follow this point are the only ones addressed by the poet to the reader. They are:

"There pass, with melancholy state,
By all the solemn heaps of fate,
And think, as softly - sad you tread
Above the venerable dead,
'Time was, like thee they life possest
And time shall be, that thou shalt rest.'"

Astanza in Isaac Watts's[1] little poem "Death and Eternity" gives this same idea in very similar words:

"Some hearty friend shall drop his tear
On our dry bones and say,
'These once were strong as mine appear,
And mine must be as they.'"

The graves are classified in three groups. The first group includes the nameless graves

"Where toil and poverty repose;"-,

The second group includes the graves of

"A middle race of mortals - - - - ,
Men, half ambiticus, all unknown;"

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1. Died 1748.

and the third group includes the vaulted arches where

"Arms, angels, epitaphs, and bones,
These, all the poor remains of state,
Adorn the rich, or praise the great."

Parnell disposes of the first group in four lines, the second in six and the third in eight. Whether this represents his idea of the relative importance of the three classes of society, or whether to the poet the tragedy in the death of the great is more intense than in the death of the lowly, it is unsafe to say; but the latter conjecture is more pleasing. In speaking of the tombs of the great the poet uses this line:

"Arms, angels, epitaphs, and bones."

I think there can not be found in all the graveyard poems a line more fraught with the ghastly suggestion of death and fallen greatness.

While the poet gazes upon thevarious graves and stones the moon goes down and the shades appear

"All slow, and wan, and wrapp'd with shrouds,
- -
And all with sober accent cry,
'Think, mortal, what it is to die.'"

Then from the charnel-house he hears a voice, and bids the ravens cease their croakings and the clocks their tolling, that he may hear the message of the spirit of Death. This stanza, the seventh, is filled with the usual machinery of melancholy poetry, such as "funeral Yew", Charnel-house", ravens", "tolling clocks", "mid-

night", and "bones".

The message which the poet hears is old and brief: man himself supplies Death with scythe and darts, by looking upon him as the "last of things"; death is but a path to a state of ease; and pious souls "at parting hence", like men released from long imprisonment,

"Clap the glad wing and tower away,
And mingle with the blaze of day."[1]

Such, at a rather brief glance, are the important characteristics of the "Night Piece on Death". The spirit of it, like that of the other two poems to be taken up, is essentially christian. In so far as it congratulates the soul on its escape from the flesh, it strikes the note of other-worldliness, and is thus marked by that Characteristic of the poems of melancholy which is, to depreciate the joys of this life. In its entirety, the situation is much more unearthly, than that in most of its kind and lacks something of the subdued gloom of Gray's "Elegy"; and the assembly of tombs, bones, and shrouded spirits, is well chosen to prepare the mind for such a message as is in store for it.

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1. "Cow'rs down, and dozes till the dawn of day,
Then claps his well-fledg'd wings and bears away."
Blair's "Grave".

Robert Blair's[1]

"Grave".

There are conflicting opinions concerning the merits of this poem. Samuel Johnson "did not like it much"[2]; but Boswell continues, "I differ from him; for though it is not equal throughout, and is seldom elegantly correct, it abounds in solemn thought, and poetical imagery beyond the common reach. The world has differed from him; for the poem has passed through many editions, and is still much read by people of a sericus cast of mind." Edmund Gosse says[3] "The'Grave' was the first and the best of a whole series of mortuary poems." (Just why he says"first" is not clear).

We shall not attempt to say which of these judgments is correct, except in so far as shall be called for in a review of the poem. However, these facts are pretty generally admitted; the poem contains much originality of thought and expression; a vigorous masculinity is evident throughout the poem, many lines comparing favorably in this respect with some of the most forceful lines in Shakspere; the poet never wanders from his subject; and the poem is marked by ease, a healthy tone, and a rough moral anatomy.

In the first ten lines the poet addresses the grave as the "Eternal King! whose potent arm sustains

The keys of hell and death," and sets himself the particular task,

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1. Blair, a Scotchman, was born 1699, and died 1746. "The Grave" was published 1743.
2. Boswell (Malone), 301. 3. Dict, of Nat. Biog. II:627.

" - the task be mine
To paint the gloomy horrors of the Tomb."

The following seventeen lines are devoted to a description of the surroundings, and here the yew tree,

"Cheerless, unsocial plant!"

is the central figure.

The dreary solitude of the old church at night is next pictured. Spectres pass and repass, the screech-owl shrieks, and the wind howls till

" it makes ones blood run chill."

The following lines are difficult to parallel in their suggestion of weird terror:

"The wind is up: hark! how it howls! me thinks
Till now, I never heard a sound so dreary:
Doors creak, and windows clap, and night's foul bird,
Rook'd in the spire, screams loud: the gloomy isles
Black-plaistered, and hung round with shreds of scutcheons
And tatter'd coats of arms, send back the sound
Laden with heavier airs, from the low vaults,
The mansions of the dead."

It is such passages as this one that place the "Grave" far above the "Elegy" in point of ghastliness, suggestion, and force of expression.

Lines 45 -84 give a description of the Churchyard. The church is surrounded by ragged elms, some so thin at top

"That scare two crows can lodge in the same tree."

Wild shrieks have been heard about the place, dead men have come and walked about, and the bell has rung, untouched. The description of the school-boy,

"with his satchel in his hand
Whistling aloud to bear his courage up,
And lightly tripping o'er the long flat stones,"

has been pointed out[1] as "one of the most natural and pleasing pictures throughout the whole poem." The second line quoted has become a proverb. Following this is the "new made widow" who

"crawls along in doleful black
While bursts of sorrow gush from either eye,"

and finally drops

"Prone on the lonely grave of the dear man,"

and

"Clings more closely to the senseless turf."

Here is that conception of the grief of the survivor which inspired Young's line

"When such friends part, 'tis the survivor dies."[2]

Blair has succeeded in his attempt to arouse the feeling of horror, probably too well.

The blessings of friendship are treated in lines 85 - 110. The most interesting thing in these lines is a number of lines some of which appear to be echoes of John Norris and others

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1. In an illustrated edition of the "Grave" and the "Elegy". London, 1785.

2. Night Thoughts

to be echoed by later poets in Blair's century. Lines 88 -89 of the "Grave " are,

"Friendship! mysterious cement of the soul;
Sweetner of life, and solder of society."

In Norris' "On a Musician Supposed to be Mad with Music" we find these lines:

"Musick, thou generous ferment of the soul,
Thou universal cement of the whole."

In thepassage,

"Of joys departed,
Not to return, how painful the remembrance!"

is found the old and familiar idea that the height of sorrow comes when we remember happier days. It is found in Boethins' "Consolations of Philosophy", later in Chaucer, and in the famous line in Tennyson's "Locksley Hall",

"A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

The following lines (94 - 106) are not surpassed in beauty by any to be found in Shakspere. This may seen a rash statement, but no defense will be attempted except the quotation of them.

"Oh! when my friend and I
In some thick wood have wandere'd heedless on,
Hid from the vulgar eye, and sat us down
Upon th e sloping cowslip-cover'd bank,
Where the pure limpid stream has fled along
In grateful errors through the underwood,

Sweet murmuring; methought the shrill-tongu'd thrush
Mended his song of love; the sooty black-bird
Mellow'd his pipe, and soften'd every note:
The Eglantine smell'd sweeter and the Rose
Assum'd a dye more deep; whilst every flower
Vy'd with its fellow-plant in luxury of dress."

The "dull grave" invades the social circle and snatches the dimple "from the cheek of Mirth", changes laughter to madness, and carries off even jesters and drolls who

"made ev'n thick-lip'd musing melancholy
To gather up her face into a smile
Before she was aware."[1]

"Proud Royalty", too, is the victim of the grave. The"hot-brain'd youth"[2] who cried because his arm was hampered

"And had not room enough to do its work,"

rests here with the Roman Caesars and the Grecian Chiefs, and bears

"The coward insults of the base-born crowd."

The last two lines of this description of the fallen great seen followed rather closely by Byron in "The Vision of Judgment", The lines of Blair are

"Sorry pre-eminence of high descent
Above the vulgar born, to rot in state."

Byron's are

"It seemed the mockery of hell to fold
The rottenness of eighty years in gold."

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1. cf. Bryant's "Thanatopsis". 2. Alexander the Great.

Blair next pictures the vain pomp and show of funerals:

"The well-plum'd hearse"

is seen, followed by

"the whole sable tribe, that painful watch
The sick man's door, and live upon the dead,
By letting out their persons by the hour
To mimic sorrow when the heart's not sad."

This rap on the knuckles of paid mourners is one of the nearest approaches to local color to be found in the poem.

The ravages of time are depicted in lines 185 - 206. Deep-cut marble, brass continues, and hieroglyphics all must wear away, for

"The best concerted schemes men lay for fame
Die fast away."[1]

Lines 207 - 318 are devoted to portraying the mockery of rank, beauty, strength, science, and eloquence, in the grave.

"Under ground
Precedency's a jest; Vassal and Lord,
Grossly familiar, side by side consume."

This is the sentiment expressed by Hervey in "Meditations among the Tombs" when he says the man reputed a sage in his day is (in the grave) content to lie down at the feet of a babe.

The petty tyrant, the "star-surveying sage", the "great Goliath", and the orator ("tongue-warrior"), all fall victims to

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1. Burns admired Blair, and seems to have echoed this sentiment in "To a Mouse":
"The best-laid schemes o'mice an' men
Gang aft agley"

death. In the closing lines of this passage the poet discloses his feeling toward epitaphs.

"Perchance some hackney, hunger-bitten Scribbler,
Insults thy memory, and blots thy tomb
With long flat narrative, or duller rhymes,
With heavy halting pace that drawl along;
Enough to rouse a dead man into rage,
And warm with red resentment the wan cheek."[1]

In the next fifty-one lines the doctor is asked what avails now his cordials and cures, and "the lank-sided miser" where "are his rents, his comings-in?" In many cases there are very evident allusions to Scripture and this latter seems to be a case in point, when the last three lines of the passage are noted:

"Oh, Cursed lust for Gold! when for thy sake,
The fool throws up his int'rest in both worlds:
First starved in this, then damn'd in that to come."[2]

The description of death, lines 369 - 381, is rather realistic than pleasant. The frantic soul is pictured running round the walls of her clay tenement, while

"Her very eyes weep blood,"

and finally

"she sinks to everlasting woe."

The editor of the 1785 edition of the "Grave" referred to on a pre-

1. Variation from the regular metre is very rare in the poem, and this is the most extreme case.
2. "The love of money is the root of all evil." I Tim. VI : 10

vious page, characterizes this passage as "truly pathetic and sublime;" but it is felt that any one reading it in the spirit most resembling that of the passage, will feel a relief when it is finished. The passage is revolting to the mind still content with this earth. Yet we doubt not this was the poet's aim, and so the use of the passage is justified.

Blair delivers a stirring lecture against suicide. If death were the end of all then the debaucher might

"Untrembling mouth the heav'ns,"

and the sot

"reel over his bowl,"

with impunity; and the wretch

"That's weary of the world, and tired of life,
At once give each inquietude the slip,
By stealing out of being when he pleased."

(It is such lines as these that justified the comparison of Blair's language in this poem with Shakspere's most admired lines). But there is a hereafter, as conscience tells us, so it must be doubly horrid to die by one's own hand. Blair seems to construct a new theory concerning the spirits of the damned, for he says of the departed spirits of suicides,

"The 'common' damned shun their society,
And look upon themselves as Fiends less foul."[1]

The suicide is denominated a coward and a fool, for he runs away from ills, and boldly ventures on an unknown world.

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1. Whether Blair makes this distinction for the sake of emphasis can not be determined, but it is hardly justified by Scripture.

In lines 431 - 446, the dead are implored to inform us what it is to die. Blair here again seems indebted to John Norris. In Norris' "The Meditation" are these lines:

"Some courteous ghost, tell us this great secrecy,
What 'tis you are and we must be."

Lines 431 - 434 of the "Grave" read thus:

"Tell us, ye dead, will none of you, in pity
To those you left behind, disclose the secret?
Oh! that some courteous ghost would blab it out;
What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be."

There is not wanting an occasional line to remind the reader that after all he is in the land of the living, as in the following. The poet despairs of any foreknowledge concerning the future life and contents himself with the reflection that a

"little time will clear up all."

Then follows a passage on the universality of death, which very much resembles the one noted before concerning the common fate of lord, servant, miser, and doctor, except that here men of different nations and different religious creeds are shown in the common resting place, at piece and of one rank. But some of the lines are worthy particular notice. The grave-digger in "Hamlet" is forcibly recalled by the following lines:

"See yonder maker of the dead man's bed,
The Sexton, hoary-headed chronicle,
Of hard unmeaning face, down which ne'er stole

A gentle tear; with mattock in his hand,
Digs through whole rows of kindred and acquaintance,
By far his juniors. - Scarce a scull's cast up,
But well he knew its Owner, and can tell
Some passage of his life."[1]

The other important part of this passage is the reproof administered to man for having no thought of death.

"Fools that we are,
Never to think of death and of ourselves
At the same time: as if to learn to die
Were no concern of ours."

Lines 501 - 540 is a ghastly portrayal of the medley of death, in a large degree repetition of former passages. The lover, the prelate, the large-limb'd peasant, the child

"Of a span long that never saw the sun,"

the mother, the barren wife, and the "long-demurring Maid," the sober widow, and the "young green Virgin," garrulous old age, and the"shrill-tongu'd Shrew," and all degrees of virtue, wisdom and piety, - all are here of common worth and fame.

In the passage following this the main theme is the brevity of life, and man's original happy state, when,

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1. "This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the Kings jester."
- Hamlet V : 1, 198 - 9.

"Sound was the body and the soul serene,"

But

"what sudden turns!
What strange vicissitudes in the first leaf
Of man's sad history."

Lines 586 - 589 are worthy of special attention. The poet is speaking of man's first sin:

"the Good he scorn'd
Stalk'd off reluctant like an ill-us'd ghost,
Not to return; - or if it did, its visits,
Like those of angels, short and far between."

In John Norris' "The Parting" are these lines:

"How fading are the joys we dote upon,
Like apparitions seen and gone:
But those which soonest take their flight
Are the most exquisite and strong,
Like angels' visits, short and bright."

We will not charge Blair with a willful literal appropriation of Norris' line, although with the omission of the first adjective the charge would appear justified. But it may be, as A. B. Grossart observes,[1] the appropriation was a trick "cozening the brain that the treasure was its own." In Thomas Campbell's

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1. The Fuller Worthies' Library, Vol. 38, John Norris, p. 18

"The Pleasures of Hope"[1] are these lines:

"What though my wing'd hours of bliss have been,
Like angel-visits, few and far between?"

Again we will not charge plagiarism, but only observe that the three lines are strikingly similar. It is worthy noting too in this connection that William Hazlitt, in "Lectures on the English Poets,[2]" apparently credits Blair with the originality of the "angel-visits" simile. In speaking of Campbell he says:

"to use his own expression , his fine things are
'Like Angels' visits, few, and far between'."

He then observes, in a note, that the same idea is in "Blairs Grave" and laments that Campbell has spoiled the expression, pointing out that 'few' and 'far between' are the same thing.

No less a critic than Edmund Gosse has erred in his notice of this line of Blair's. In his "History of English Literature in the Eighteenth Century"[3] is this statement: "It was Blair who first spoke of 'visits, like those of angels,, short and far between'." He must either have failed to see the almost identical similarity between this line of the "Grave" and its apparen prototype in Norris' "The Parting", or have been unacquainted with the minor poems of that author, and we are at a loss to know which charge would show the greater leniency.

Lines 600 -633 picture the devastation caused by sin

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1. Part II, lines 377 -78
2. Lecture VIII.
3. p.221

and the universality of the havoc.

"Sin has laid waste,
Not here and there a country, but a world."

Lines 634 - 653 portray the gluttony of death:

"O great Man-eater!
Whose ev'ry day is carnival, not sated yet!
Unheard-of Epicure! without a fellow.
The veriest Gluttons do not always cram;
Some intervals of abstinence are sought
To edge the appetite; Thou seekest none."

Up to this point the one theme has been the victory of the grave. The spirit has been pagan, if not worse. But now "the old order changeth". "But know , that thou must render up the dead , and with high int'rest too".
Farther on,

"we know
Th' illustrious Deliverer of mankind,
The Son of God, theefoil'd,"

and the poem continues to the end in this truly Christian spirit. Death is a relief

"After many a painful bleeding step."

and the glad soul

"has not a wish uncrowned",

and even the flesh rests in hope of

"meeting once again its better half".

Each soul shall be furnished with a body, but it is not ours to ask how this can be; we are to trust in the unimpaired arm of the Almighty. The conscious soul shall know its partner, and,

"into its arms,
Shall rush with all th' impatience of a man
That's new come home,"

nor time nor death shall part them more. So after all the horrors of the grave,

"'Tis but a night, a long and moonless night;
We make the Grave our bed, and then are gone."

The last four lines are worth quoting for the completion of the rather pretty simile, and also for the only rhyme occuring in the poem.

"Thus at the shut of ev'n, the weary Bird
Leaves the wide air, and in some lonely brake
Cow'rs down, and dozes till the dawn of day,
Then claps his well-fledg'd wings, and bears away."[1]

In general, and in many details, the poem is an admirable piece of English literature, not alone as a poem of melancholy and gloom, but as one with a healthy moral and spiritual atmosphere. There is gloom in the poem to satisfy the most morbid, and one can easily fancy the larger part to have been written by the light of a candle stuck in a skull, as Young's "Night Thoughts" is said to

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1. This line is especially pleasing in the imagery and metrical effect.

have been ; but before the poet was done the light of the sun burst in , and the triumphant soul is seen departing for "the bosom of its father and its God." We will quit the "Grave" with a quotation from Gosse's "History of English Literature in theEighteenth Century."[1]

"Among the single didactic poems of a gloomy cast, of which so many were produced during the eighteenth century, 'The Grave' stands highest in point of execution, and is the least overweighted with mere rhetoric and commonplace."

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1. p/221.

Thomas Gray's[1]

"Elegy, written in a Country Church-yard".

In a study of Gray's "Elegy" one does not need to look far to learn why he found inspiration in a Church-yard, for his was a naturally melancholy spirit. In a letter to Richard West[2] (August 22, 1737) we have this confession from him: "Low spirits are my true and faithful companions; they get up with me, go to bed with me, make journeys and returns as I do; nay, and pay visits, and will even affect to be jocase, and force a feeble laugh with me; but most commonly we sit alone together, and are the prettiest insipid company in the world." It is not difficult to understand that a poetic genius marked by melancholy to this extent should feel a companionship with night, yew trees, owls, and tombstones. No other short poem in the English language has been more praised or oftener parodied.[3] Its popularity began with its first publication. Leslie Stephen says "It went through four editions in two months and eleven in a short time."[4] In Johnson's "Life" of Gray we learn at once of that critic's opinion of the poem and the general popularity it was enjoying late in the eighteenth century: "In the character of his Elegy I rejoice to concur with

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1. Gray's dates are 1716 - 1771. The "Elegy" was published by Dodsley 1751.
2. West died 1742, and Gray composed his solitary sonnet on his death.
3. Walter Hamilton, "Parodies of English and American Authors" vol.V, notes fifty-nine parodies of the "Elegy".
4. Dict. of Nat'l. Biog., VIII, 467.

the common reader; - - - - - - - - - The 'Churchyard' abounds with images which find a mirrour in every mind and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo." This judgment of Johnson's is the more notable when we remember that this is the only one of Gray's poems he admired.

The beauties of the "Elegy" are so evident that an attempt at even a brief analysis seems presumption, and to point out a few cases of Gray's apparent indebtedness to other writers may ruffle the feathers of even the least ardent admirers of his household poem; but in treating it as a typical "graveyard" poem both of these are justified.

The first four stanzas are given over to the setting, and in these are found nearly all the properties of poets of melancholy: darkness, solemn stillness, ivy-mantled tower, owl, moon, solitary, yew tree, mouldering heap, narrow cell. The poet gradually works up (or down) to the grave and lingers there. At the close of stanza IV the reader is prepared for a descent into the grave such as he experiences in Blair's "Grave" or Flatman's Dooms-day Thought," but he is disappointed, although agreeably so.

The second line of stanza I was written by Gray,

"The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,"

but the verb seems to have been changed to the singular by some of the nineteenth century publishers. W. J. Rolfe observes in "Notes and Queries,"[1] "No editor since Mathias(1814) has given the

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1. 5th Ser. VII, 143 (Feb., 1877)

second line of the "Elegy" as Gray wrote it." This offense was probably largely committed by editors of school readers; at any rate the error has been corrected by the editor[1] of the Aldine edition of Gray's poems (1907).

In the first edition the following stanza seems to have been the fifth,[2]

"Hark! how the sacred calm that breathes around,
Bids every fierce tumultuous passion cease;
In still small accents whisp'ring from the ground,
A grateful earnest of eternal peace."

One wonders why such lines as these should be omitted in the "Elegy". The line

"Each in his narrow cell forever laid"

has been pointed out[3] as one likely to lead weak minds to question the resurrection of the dead, and the suggestion is made that "forever" be altered to "forgotten". But this is approaching pedantry, because "forever", I believe, means only "till time shall be no more."

The brief but ideal picture of domestic joy in stanza VI is most pleasing in the poem. The metre is perfect, and the words most fitting.

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1. John Bradshaw
2. Note in a 1785 edition of the "Grave" and the "Elegy".
3. Ibid.

"For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share."

Gray here probably had in mind the following lines of Thomson's "Winter":

"In vain for him the officious wife prepares
The fire fair-blazing, and the vestment warm,
In vain his little children, peeping out
Into the mingling storm, demand their sire,
With tears of artless innocence. Alas!
Nor wife nor children more shall he behold,
Nor friends nor sacred home."[1]

Stanza VIII shows the social class which enlisted Gray's sympathies: it is the common country folk. Parnell, in the "Night Piece", distinguished, as we noticed, three classes of the dead, and listened to a message equally suitable for as many of the living; but Gray sings the praises of the dead poor and cautions the "Proud" not to chide.

Stanza XI is one of the most famous of the whole poem. It was this one which Wolfe quoted on the eve of the capture of Quebec, and led him to express a preference of literary to military glory. It is possible that Gray found the germ of the idea here

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1. lines 311 - 317

expressed in Richard West's "Monody on the Death of Queen Caroline."[1]
The stanza reads,

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Await alike the inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

West's lines are:

"Ah me! what boots us all our boasted power,
Our golden treasure, and our purpled state?
They can not ward th' inevitable hour,
Nor stay the fearful violence of Fate."

Edward Young has expressed the same idea in "Night Thoughts":[2]

"Earth's highest station ends in 'Here he lies':
And 'dust to dust' concludes her noblest song."

Stanza XI beginning,

"Can storied urn or animated bust,"

is severe in its ridicule of tombstone panegyric.

"But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of Time did ne'er unroll:
Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of their soul."

Here is shown the proverbial rural ignorance; but one can read between the lines that the poet believed in the intrinsic worth

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1. West died 1742, and the "Elegy" was probably begun in the same year.
2. "Night IV" lines 99 - 100.

of the commoner, and in this particular he strikes a familiar graveyard note.

The following stanza (XV) is of interest as showing one of the early elements of the Romantic movement, viz, local color:

"Some village-Hampden that with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood."

Originally, ~~it is said~~, the names of Roman heroes were used instead of English. The three stanzas that follow are devoted to an enumeration of the blessings which "their lot forbade"; and emphasises the fact that though their growing virtues were retarded, their crimes were also confined to narrow limits.

In the stanza,

"Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray:
Along the cool sequestr'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way,"

Gray probably meant to emphasise the wisdom of Providence in suiting the mind of poverty to humble conditions. Samuel Johnson says[1] of the four stanzas XX - XXIII, "The four stanzas beginning 'Yet even these bones' are to me original: I have never seen the notions in any other place; yet he that reads them here persuades himself that he has always felt them."

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1. Life of Gray.

Stanza XXII breaths a sentiment not exactly in accordance with the scriptural[1] idea of the departure of the soul. We have noticed in the "Grave" the eagerness of the pious soul[2] to quit this life.

"Oh! how he longs
To have his passport signed and be dismiss'd."

Gray has the rustic moralist cast a "longing lingering look behind" on leaving this life.

The last two lines of stanza XXIII are not exactly clear:

"Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature crys,
Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted Fires."

If Johnson had continued his criticism of the four lines ending here with an interpretation of these lines he had done well.

In the lines spoken by the"hoary-headed Swain" (stanzas XXV - XIX) we are given a brief glimpse of the most common Characteristics of the contemplative mind. For beauty of numbers and description the following stanza (XXVI) is one of the first in the poem:

"There at the foot of yonder nodding beech,
That wreaths its old fantastic roots so high,
His listless length at noontide would he stretch
And pore upon the brook that babbles by."

In the first edition of the poem this stanza was followed by the following:

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1. Philippians : I : 28
2. And Gray surely had in mind no other here.

"Him have we seen the green wood side along,
While o'er the heath we past, our labor done;
Oft as the wood-lark pip'd her farewell song,
With wistful eyes pursue the setting sun;"

and the following was the last preceding the "Epitaph":

"There scatter'd oft, the earliest of the year
By hands unseen are show'rs of vi'lets found:
The red-breast loves to build and warble there,
And little footsteps lightly trip the ground."

I insert these two stanzas for the same reason I have inserted former ones: there tone is in keeping with that of the whole poem, and their pleasing qualities in general make them worthy of preservation.

But for the "Epitaph" the element of Christian hope would be very slight. The last stanza, however, pictures the departed soul awaiting judgment. I take it that Gray would not have us think the soul of the departed is in final bliss, but that his frailties and merits alike await judgment, "in trembling hope."

The "Elegy" is not the extreme type of melancholy poetry, and one wonders if it is for this reason that some critics[1] consider it the high-water mark of the graveyard school of poetry. For a delight in lingering among the tombs and listening to harangues by departed spirits, the "Grave" and the "Night Piece on

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1. Beers, Phelps, et al.

Death" far exceed it. Blair delights in drawing the frailties of the departed from their "dread abode", while Gray cautions in particular against such behavior. I feel that among the poems of calm, pensive melancholy the "Elegy" stands first, but that among those which express a delight in ghastliness of the tomb, that is, those properly termed "graveyard poems", it must yield first place to such pieces as the "Grave" and the "Night Piece on Death."

CHAPTER IV.

The following list of melancholy poems is by no means exhaustive; but I believe it contains all the principal ones of the eighteenth century. Some of them may seem not to belong in such a collection, but I think there is none in the list, that is not marked by the note of meditation and the tendency to reflect on life.

From Nichol's Collection of Poems.

Volume II:

Against the Fear of Death.

Sir Robert Howard.

Volume III:

An Essay upon Death.

Dr. Waldren.

Volume V:

Against Fear of Death.

Stonestreet

Volume VI:

Looking on a Tombstone.

Whaley

Volume VII:

Content. Cleiveland.

Survey of the World. Cleiveland.

A Juvenile Wish. J. Nichol.

A Midnight Soliloquy. J. Nichol.

Volume VIII:

On an Urn. Ridley.

Ode to Melancholy. - - - - - -

Night. An ElegiacPoem. - - - - - -

Epitaph. W. Shenstone.

Three other similar sources of melancholy poetry are the following:

New Foundling Hospital For Wit, London, 1790. 14 volumes.

Dryden's Miscellanies, London, 1727, 6 volumes.

Bell's Fugitive Poetry, London, 1790, 14 volumes.

Joseph Addison (1672 - 1719).

A Midnight Thought.

A Meditation on Job.

A Sigh.

Ode to Death.

A Dream.

The Husbandman's Meditation in the Field.

James Beattie (1735 - 1790).

Ode To Hope.

Triumph of Melancholy.

Retirement.

Elegies (two)

The Hermit.

Epitaph.

Robert Blair (1699 - 1746).

The Grave.

Vincent Bourne (1695 - 1747).

At an Open Grave.

Thomas Chatterton (1752 - 1770).

Elegies (four)

William Collins (1721 - 1759).

Ode to Evening.

J. G. Cooper (1723 - 1769).

The Tomb of Shakspere.

Nathaniel Catton (1707? - 1788).

The Night Piece.

William Cowper (1731 - 1800).

Verses, supposed to have been written by Alexander Selkirk.

Hope.

On Receipt of My Mother's Picture.

John Cunningham (1729 - ?).

The Contemplatist: A Night Piece.

Elegy, on a Pile of Ruins.

John Dyer (1700 - 1758).

Ruins of Rome.

James Grainger (1723? - 1767).

Solitude, An Ode.

Thomas Gray (1716 - 1771).

Elegy written in a Country Churchyard.

Hymn to Adversity.

Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College.

Ode on Pleasures arising from Vicissitudes.

George Keate (? - ?)

Netley Abbey.

Absence, an Elegy.

Robert Lloyd (1733 - 1764).

To the Moon.

David Mallet (? - 1765).

Amyntor and Theodora.

William and Margaret.

William Mason (1733 - 1764).

Musaeus.

Odes (six).

Elegies (four)

Il Pacifico.

Il Bellicoso.

In a Churchyard in South Wales.

John Ogilvie (1733 - 1813)

Solitude.

Ode to Melancholy.

Ode to Sleep.

Thomas Parnell (1679 - 1718).

A Night Piece on Death.

The Hermit.

Hymn to Contentment.

Alexander Pope (1688 - 1744).

The dying Christian to His Soul.

Ode to Solitude.

Elegy to an Unfortunate Young Lady.

William Shenstone (1714 - 1763).

Elegies (I, XI, XVII, XXIV).

Gavin Turnbull (-).

Ode to Melancholy.

Evening.

Elegies (1, 2, 5, 7, 9 - 12).

Joseph Warton (1722 - 1800).

Ode to Fancy.

To Solitude.

To the Nightingale.

The Enthusiast.

Thomas Warton (1728 - 1790).

The Pleasures of Melancholy.

Ode To Sleep.

The Suicide.

Inscription in a Hermitage.

Ode to the Approach of Summer.

Isaac Watts (1674 - 1748).

Death and Eternity.

William Whitehead (1715 - 1785).

In a Hermitage.

Edward Young (1681 - 1765).

The Complaint, or Night Thoughts.

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London, 1794, 4 volumes.

Anderson's British Poets.
London, 1795, 13 volumes.

Poetical Works of Beattie, Blair, and Falconer, with Lives by George Gilfillan.
Edinburg, 1854.

A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century.
by H. A. Beers,
New York, 1899.

Blair's "Grave" and Gray's "Elegy".
London, 1785.

Boswell's Life of Johnson,
ed. Malone.
New York, 1860.

Poetical Works of Vimcent Bourne.
Oxford, 1826.

The Religio Medici and Other Writings of Sir Thomas Browne.
Everyman Edition
London and New York. (no date)

Chalmer's English Poets.
London, 1810, 21 volumes.

A Collection of the Writings of Daniel De Foe.

London, 1703, 2 volumes.

Dictionary of National Biography.

New York and London, 1908.

22 volumes.

Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn,

ed. William Bray,

London 1859, 4 volumes.

Poems and Songs,

by Thomas Flatman.

London, 1681, (4edition).

Miscellaneous Works of Oliver Goldsmith.

London, 1801, 4 volumes.

A History of English Literature (18th century),

by E. Gosse,

London, 1907.

The Works of Thomas Gray,

Ed. by E. Gosse,

London, 1884, 4 volumes.

Miscellanies of the Fuller Worthies Library.

Ed. by A. B. Grossart,

Volume 38.

Collected Works of William Hazlitt,

Volume 5,

London, 1902.

Works of Samuel Johnson,

Ed, by R. Lyman,

London, 1825, 6 volumes.

Parodies of English and American Authors,

Collected by W. Hamilton.

London 1889, volume 5.

Meditations and Contemplations,

James Hervey,

Pittsburgh, Pa., 1834.

Works of William Law,

London, 1762, 9 volumes.

John Nichol's Collection of Poems,

London, 1780, 8 volumes.

Treatises upon Several Subjects,

John Norris,

London, 1697.

Collection of Miscellanies.

John Norris,

London, 1699.

English Literature in the Eighteenth Century.

T. S. Perry,

New York, 1883.

Beginning of the English Romantic Movement,

W. L. Phelps,

Boston, 1893.

Works of Alexander Pope,

Ed. by Joseph Warton, et al.
London, 1797, 9 volumes.

The Ladies Library,

Pub. by Richard Steele,
London, 1714, 3 volumes.

English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century,

Leslie Stephen,
London, 1907.

A History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century,

Leslie Stephen,
London, 1881, (ed. 2) 2 volumes.

Works of Jonathøn Swift.

Edinburg, 1868.

History of English Literature,

by H. A. Taine,
Trans. by H. VanLaun,
Edinburg, 1872, (Ed. 2) 2 volumes.

Centuries of Meditations,

Thomas Traherne,
London, 1908.

Poetical Essays,

Gavin Turnbull,
Glasgow, 1788.

Poetical Works of Thomas Warton,

Oxford, 1802, (Ed. 5) 2 volumes.

Poems on Several Occasions.

William Whitehead.

London, 1754.

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